



Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

**For the labor rights and all human
rights of the maquiladora workers**



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Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, for www.cfomaquiladoras.org

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One-day Work Stoppage, Work Slowdown in the Three Alcoa Plants!

This past February 9, 2005, more than 1,500 workers from the first shift of Plants #1, #2 and Subaru of the company Manufacturera de Componentes Eléctricos de México (Macoelmex) conducted a general work stoppage that, in some lines, lasted nearly eight hours. The work stoppage was a protest of an announcement by the CTM union and the company that the workers would be given 4% wage increases in exchange for benefit reductions.

The work stoppage began in Plant #1 as some union leaders went around line-by-line informing the workers about the wage proposal negotiated between them and Macoelmex management. The workers who began to receive the news before eight in the morning sent messages to the other lines as the union leaders went to visit them. The message to stop working soon extended to Plants # 2 and Subaru.

The rank-and-file work stoppage was not only an effective pressure tactic against the company, but yet another sign of repudiation and disavowal of the leadership of Leocadio Hernández of the CTM. The CTM simply lost control of the situation, including its capacity as a liaison with management.

The rank-and-file extended its protest to Thursday and Friday, thereby slowing the speed of production. The workers calculate that this work slowdown reduced the production by more than half. Workers continued sending a strong message to the company of disagreement with measures that undermine their working conditions.

Seven negative measures

The seven negative measures to be implemented are:

- **Negatively and "temporarily" modify several benefits for 18 months** via an agreement between the company and the union. The objective of this change would be to "give the company breathing room". Supposedly the agreement would expire at the end of this term. The workers are clearly not so naive as to think that after a year and a half the company and the union would give them back their benefits.
- Take away the **punctuality bonus** for an entire month for workers who arrive just a minute late in a week. This is an absolute zero tolerance policy. Currently workers can forfeit this bonus, but only for the week in which it happens. This bonus ranges from 90 to 150 pesos, depending on the worker's job classification.
- Take away the **attendance bonus** for a whole month if workers miss just one day in a week. Currently workers can lose the bonus, but just for the week of the absence. This bonus ranges from 115 to 166 pesos. The workers will be able to keep it only when they bring a voucher from IMSS justifying their absence.
- Pay the **Christmas bonus and vacations based only on base wages**. The Federal Labor Law and the Macoelmex collective bargaining agreement stipulate that these benefits should be paid based on composite wages.
- Use the **Savings Fund** from the out-of-town workers – 45 pesos per week – to pay for their transportation from the *ejidos* where they live to the factory in Piedras Negras. Macoelmex will continue providing 45 pesos to the fund. The workers who live in the city will not be affected by this measure. The company has, until now, provided round-trip transportation for the out-of-town workers.
- **Suspend the student assistance**. The company wants to suspend the student assistance won in the last collective bargaining agreement in January 2004 that paid three days' wages in August to support workers' children.
- Give **just a 4% wage increase** in exchange for these take-backs.

"If you don't give, don't take away."

Completely overrun by the rank-and-file, the *charro* union leaders from the CTM were pressured to admit that the workers said they would be better off to continue as they were with no wage increase, but still the same benefits. "If you don't give, don't take away." The problem is that Macoelmex launched its offensive, counting on the union's approval.

The dilemma of accepting the whole package offered by the company or remaining with what they had before was not to the workers' liking. Macoelmex managers also threatened that, if the workers didn't accept either of the options, the plant would move to Honduras.

What is in play – accepting the company's package or even having it simply imposed on the workers against their will – is that if there are more work area changes and layoffs, or if the company does move, the end result would be a mutilated base wage and, therefore, the indemnity quantities would be less.

Furthermore, according to the collective bargaining agreement, contract negotiations are programmed for January 2006. So if the 18-month agreement is signed today or was already signed behind the workers' backs, the company could refuse to renegotiate the contract's clauses next year.

Workers are again being harassed

- The system of monitoring and harassing the workers is back, this time via guards who are again spread throughout the plant watching where groups of workers form and taking note of the workers who talk amongst themselves.
- Video cameras have been installed throughout the plant and outside of the company; workers are monitored until they break for lunch.
- Security guards have been stationed at the entrances leading to the other plants. Workers from the Subaru Plant cannot enter Plant #2 and workers from Plant #2 cannot enter Plant #1, and so on.
- The supervisors instigated the February 9 work stoppage by telling the workers that they either agreed to the plant's proposals or could go out into the hallway. This was done to provoke firings.
- The workers are being called to the infirmary to fill-out a survey asking them for all their personal information, including their addresses. This surprises the workers because, supposedly, the company already has this information.
- Workers are being forced to work Saturdays and Sundays as well.

The "threat of Honduras"

The local press in Piedras Negras tried to hide the news that effectively there was a general one-day work stoppage. The following morning, the headline of La Voz newspaper read: "Work stoppage threatened in Macoelmex", while the Zócalo newspaper simply didn't mention anything. However, by Friday, February 11, the news wasn't the work stoppage, rather the "threat of Honduras". In order to scare, threaten and pressure the rank-and-file into accepting the changes proposed by management, the business sector, local and state government leaders, and the CTM union joined voices repeating that Macoelmex would leave Piedras Negras for Honduras if the workers didn't give in.

For several days the news media repeated the message that the dilemma was either lose 2,000 jobs as Macoelmex leaves the city or that the workers accepted the benefit reductions. Not until the beginning of the February 14 week did company management and the mayor of Piedras Negras begin to assure that Macoelmex was not thinking about closing. For more information, read *México no cerrará sus plantas en Piedras Negras*.

The CTM hits bottom; Mayor tries to mediate

The enormous lack of respect that has always accompanied the union leader Leocadio Hernández hit bottom in these couple weeks. Both the workers and the company have moved him to one side since he no longer serves the interests of either party. As a result, the mayor of Piedras Negras has become a sort of go-between although in reality he intercedes more on behalf of the company. The workers ask how is it possible that the mayor wants to keep Macoelmex in the city without thinking about the workers?

The union and its delegates remained incapable of negotiating for the workers. In different meetings the workers shouted at these leaders that, since they can't get them any benefits, they shouldn't sell them out either. The union's offices are empty due to these leaders' fears that workers who feel very upset and betrayed will physically attack them. At the same time, amongst the rank-and-file there's a great feeling of solidarity.

"They act as if they pay us, we act as if we work."

While the mayor begs from and supports the company, the latter seems to be making the decision to simply impose upon the workers its benefit reductions, which only makes the situation tenser.

The workers are not working at 100% capacity until the situation is resolved. Their logic is: is the company acts as if they are paying us; we'll act as if we're working.

Workers' demands of management

The Alcoa workers on the border (Macoelmex in Piedras Negras and Arneses in Ciudad Acuña) had already proposed various demands to management one week before the work stoppage. Alcoa responded and cleared up some of the workers' worries.

Their main points of concern are:

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| * Moving plants to Honduras | Macoelmex and Arneses |
| * Refused to give wage increases | Macoelmex and Arneses |
| * Unreachable evaluations | Macoelmex and Arneses |
| * Rumors of layoffs only to rehire and layoffs without legal severance payments | Macoelmex |
| * 500 peso bonuses every three weeks | Arneses |
| * Reduction of night shift hours | Arneses |

Read the description of each point, and Alcoa's responses.

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